My Stance on Gaza as a Religious Man

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1 Speaking Out

6b I am young and you are old, so I held back from telling you what I think. 7 I thought, 'Those who are older should speak, for wisdom comes with age.' 8 But there is a spirit within people, the breath of the Almighty within them, that makes them intelligent. 9 Sometimes the elders are not wise. Sometimes the aged do not understand justice. 10 So listen to me, and let me tell you what I think.

Job 36: 6-10, NLT

I held my tongue on this issue when I felt pressed to speak for many months. I hesitated because I felt I would create too much drama between friends and family, because I felt I did not know enough about the situation, because I was afraid I would be labeled anti-Semitic, anti-Islam, or pro-terrorism by either camp, because I was afraid I would lose career and education opportunities because of my view.

However, too many powerful, popular, partisan, and dishonest people have spoken loudly. Too many reasonable voices have been shut down in favor of appeasing one side or the other. Too many attempts at discussion have started off without a thorough understand of the other side's viewpoint. Above all, God has visited upon me both the experiences of death and life this year. The experience of life and death in Gaza now resonates deep in my soul, and not addressing their pain feels against my own soul.

2 Life and Death

Some people will be reading this with ears attuned to the way I say certain phrases in order to quickly find which "side" I stand for. "Palestinian resistance" evokes the Arab side, "Israel's self-defense" evokes the other. I approached this issue the same way for many months until my Pawpaw died in March.

At the end of his life, he was unable to do anything on his own. He struggled to walk, needed help doing daily activities, and was directed every step by his family. He was utterly helpless without us. I saw the news of the IDF sending leaflets for Northern Gazans to flee Southward before the rocket bombardments. A thought popped in my mind and will stick with me forever. How would my family have complied? How would we have moved my grandfather? How would we have transported and tracked his medication while we fled? How would he even understand what we were doing? What would I tell him when he asks why we can't go home?

My son was born seven months after my Pawpaw passed. Pawpaw was the first to know about him, and now I sit here wishing Pawpaw had lived longer to meet him. When I put him down in the bassinet, and he screams with all four limbs outstretched because he needs me to hold him, a thought of the Palestinian children popped in my head. Who would comfort them when their parents are destroyed? Who would raise them when their extended family no longer exists? How could a society possibly recover when so much trauma is inflicted on its members?

3 The Baseline

I am sick of people pretending this is primarily a political issue when we are not politicians. I am sick of hearing, "Well, war sucks." I am sick of hearing, "So Israel doesn't have a right to defend itself?" when a shred of sympathy is shown for the Palestinian people. I am sick of being told this is a conversation about strategy before it is an issue about human beings.

What is happening in Gaza is an absolute tragedy. For Senators, House members, and world leaders to not address this simple fact is also a tragedy. To ignore an entire population of people being crippled to its knees in order to argue the finer semantics of the meaning "genocide" is to miss the point of the definition itself. To think that college students marching against the IDF is pro-terrorism is to refuse even the attempt to understand their perspective. To unilaterally support a government because of the name "Israel" without observing its conduct is foolish and against the old Prophets of that once great nation. To label anyone who deeply criticizes Israel as anti-Semitic is also to reject that tradition and the cutting words of Jesus Christ.

4 Callings

I call first on my friends and family to look beyond the politics and first see the humanity of the situation. If we cannot even view it on a human level before

the politics, where is the integrity that fuels the values behind our politics? If we cannot feel deep pain for the elderly and newly created orphans of Gaza, what is all our spiritual practice even for?

I call on strangers to see beyond the binary of pro-Israel or pro-Hamas. I call on you to see instead our obligation to reject binaries and search for the nuance in these insane situations. Doesn't the gravity of the situation demand more than simply labeling people as one side or the other?

I call on politicians to be humans first and politicians second. Is your governor, senator, or representative more than a one-dimensional voice line on this issue, or have they spoken about it at length and identified with the pain of another people? The number of Senators who have any inquiry of Palestine set to auto-reply "unequivocal support of the State of Israel" is astounding. Why not state firstly your "unequivocal support of victims of war and destruction"?

To every individual I call you to investigate the deep ties AIPAC has on American politicians as a whole. Would you support politicians funded by Russia? How many politicians have dual citizenship to Israel? Would you accept this if it was dual citizenship to China?

How can we promise to be true to our American values when we promise undying support to a country with other values? When we send them mass quantities of weapons to destroy countless lives at the cost of a war without end, are we conforming to our spiritual values or their government's values?

Above all, pray for the end of this war so the Gazans can have relief and rebuild. So that death can end and life take its place. So that our fellow human beings can live in more than sub-human levels. And recognize that every month of war costs them decades of rebuilding and the loss of invaluable souls.

5 Softened Hearts

With softened hearts, we can see that the only solution is an end to this conflict. Before we evaluate anything else, we can evaluate others by this simple question: Are we working toward peace?

The Israeli occupation of Palestine and oppression of the people within and without its borders has triggered understandable hatred toward the IDF and Netanyahu. The denial that this is occupation because Gaza wasn't a nation-state in 1948 is like saying the expulsion of Native Americans was justified because they didn't have a deed to their land. What arbitrary and legalistic standards we have stooped to! And even when the world *does* recognize their statehood, there's denial of occupation in the officially recognized land of Palestine in the West Bank! The denial of oppression in one of the most documented oppressions

in history, when even the most pro-IDF can admit to Israeli abuse, is inexcusable.

Hamas attacking Israel and expecting anything less than utter destruction and horror from the IDF was either a gross miscalculation on their part, something they ignored entirely in their craze, or deliberate. Netanyahu and the IDF seeking to "destroy" Hamas, a task which by many standards would be considered impossible and only bound to backfire, has created a generation of trauma and hatred for themselves and the US. Conservative Christians and American war-mongers advocating for this destruction have seemingly forgotten the senseless war in Afghanistan, which only served to kill American men and tarnish our name for generations in the Middle East. The Rabbis who many months ago served as luminaries in our world have turned a blind eye to Ishmael, not only casting him out in the desert, but seeking to destroy him and his children. The fact that they cannot even pray for the nation which they view contemptible shows their rejection of Abraham's ethic.

We need to hold accountable those regimes, politicians, religious leaders, and speakers who seek to lengthen this senseless war rather than find peace. We need to be bullish in our questioning, pressing oppressors, and bringing to light the extreme apathy of those in charge. We *need* to understand the other's perspective beyond simple caricatures.

We need to cry for Palestinian children, weep for the lost elderly, and carry broken hearts for the widows of Gaza. Our hearts need to waver and our hands slacken at the thought of aiding oppression. Our prayers need to daily call on God to work against those for destruction and for God to work with those for peace. We must call on God every day until this war is over.

9 God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.

Matthew 5:9, NLT